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Amdt. Dated August 4, 2004

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (cancelled) A computer-implemented product design method comprising
retaining a plurality of product layouts, each layout including one or more image containers, each image container having an associated size and position in the layout,
retaining a plurality of images, each image being associated with one or more selection criteria,
in response to the receipt of at least one selection criterion from a user, providing one or more product designs for displaying to the user, the one or more product designs having been generated from one or more retained images associated with at least one of the selection criteria entered by the user and one or more retained layouts and versions of one or more retained images, the versions being automatically sized and cropped to fit the image containers in the one or more layouts.
2. (cancelled) The method of claim 1 wherein each retained image has a specified minimum area.
3. (cancelled) The method of claim 1 wherein each retained image has a specified ideal area.
4. (new) An automated design method comprising:
selecting at least one layout from a plurality of retained layouts having one or more image containers,
selecting at least one image from a plurality of retained images having at least an image portion representing a minimum image area, and

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creating at least one cropped image version for at least one image container of at least one selected layout by performing at least a cropping operation on at least one selected image such that the cropped image version contains at least the minimum image area of the selected image.

5. (new) The method of claim 4 wherein at least one cropped image version is created such that, to the extent possible, the minimum image area is positioned substantially in the center of the cropped image version.
6. (new) The method of claim 4 wherein at least one cropped image version is created such that, to the extent possible, the minimum image area is positioned in a location in the cropped image version that is substantially proportional to the position of the minimum image area in the selected image.
7. (new) The method of claim 4 wherein the step of creating includes resizing the selected image prior to performing a cropping operation.
8. (new) An automated design method comprising:
 - selecting at least one layout from a plurality of retained layouts having one or more image containers,
 - selecting at least one image from a plurality of retained images having at least an image portion representing an ideal image area, and
 - creating at least one cropped image version for at least one image container of at least one selected layout by performing at least a cropping operation on at least one selected image such that the cropped image version is created from the portion of the image representing the ideal image area of the image.
9. (new) The method of claim 8 wherein at least one cropped image version is created such that any content that is cropped from the selected image during a cropping operation is cropped substantially equally from opposite edges of the ideal image area,

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whereby the cropped image version is created substantially from the center of the ideal image area

10. (new) The method of claim 8 wherein the step of creating includes resizing the selected image prior to performing a cropping operation.
11. (new) An automated design method comprising:
 - selecting at least one layout from a plurality of retained layouts having one or more image containers,
 - selecting at least one image from a plurality of retained images having at least an image portion representing a minimum image area and an image portion representing an ideal image area, and
 - creating at least one cropped image version for at least one image container of at least one selected layout by performing at least a cropping operation on at least one selected image such that the cropped image version contains at least the minimum image area and is created substantially from the ideal image area.
12. (new) The method of claim 11 wherein at least one cropped image version is created such that, to the extent possible, the minimum image area is positioned in a location in the cropped image version that is substantially proportional to the position of the minimum image area in the ideal image area.
13. (new) The method of claim 11 wherein at least one cropped image version is created such that, to the extent possible, the minimum image area is positioned substantially in the center of the cropped image version..
14. (new) The method of claim 11 wherein at least one cropped image version is created such that any content that is cropped from the selected image during a cropping operation is cropped substantially equally from opposite edges of the ideal image area, whereby the cropped image version is created substantially from the center of the ideal image area

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15. (new) The method of claim 11 wherein the step of creating includes resizing the selected image prior to performing a cropping operation.
16. (new) A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the steps of claim 11.
17. (new) An automated cropping method for an electronic image having a predetermined portion representing a minimum image area, the method comprising:
- (a) determining at least the size of an image container,
 - (b) if a cropped version of the image can be created that meets the conditions of (i) filling the image container, (ii) containing at least the minimum image area, and (iii) having at least a predetermined minimum image resolution, creating the cropped version of the image for the image container, and
 - (c) if a cropped image version cannot be created at step (b), identifying the image as being incompatible with the image container.
18. (new) The method of claim 17 wherein the cropped version is created at step (b) such that the cropped version includes as much of the image as possible.
19. (new) An automated cropping method for an image having a predetermined portion representing an ideal image area, the method comprising
- (a) determining at least the size of an image container,
 - (b) if a cropped version of the image can be created such that the cropped version meets the conditions of (i) filling the image container, (ii) having at least a predetermined minimum image resolution and (iii) including only content from the ideal image area, creating a corresponding cropped version,
 - (c) if a cropped version of the image cannot be created at step (b) and if a cropped version can be created such that the cropped version meets the conditions of (i) filling the image container and (ii) having at least a predetermined minimum image resolution, creating a corresponding cropped version, and

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(d) if a cropped version of the image cannot be created at step (b) or step (c), identifying the image as being incompatible with the image container.

20. (new) The method of claim 19 wherein the corresponding cropped version is created at step (b) such that the cropped version meets the further condition of (iv) including as much of the ideal image area as possible.

21. (new) The method of claim 19 wherein the corresponding cropped version created at step (c) such that the cropped version meets the further condition of (iii) including as little as possible of the image that is outside the ideal image area.

22. (new) An automated cropping method for an image having a predefined first image area and a predefined second image area, the first image area being smaller than the image and the second image area being smaller than the first image area, the method comprising

(a) determining at least the size of an image container,
(b) if the image can be cropped such that a cropped version can be created that has at least a predetermined minimum image resolution when sized to fit the image container, contains all of the second image area, and contains no part of the image that is outside of the first image area, creating a corresponding cropped version,

(c) if a cropped version cannot be created at step (b) and the image can be cropped such that a cropped version can be created that has at least a predetermined minimum image resolution when sized to fit the image container and contains all of the second image area, creating a corresponding cropped version,

(d) if a cropped version cannot be created at step (b) or (c), identifying the image as being incompatible with the image container.

23. (new) The method of claim 22 wherein the corresponding cropped version created at step (b) is created such that it includes as much of the first image area as possible.

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24. (new) The method of claim 22 wherein the corresponding cropped version created at step (c) is created such that it includes as little of the image outside of the first image area as possible.
25. (new) The method of claim 22 wherein the cropped version is created such that, to the extent possible, the first area is positioned substantially in the center of the cropped version.
26. (new) A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the steps of claim 22.
27. (new) An image processing system comprising
at least one server system having data storage means,
a plurality of layouts stored on the server system and including one or more image containers,
a plurality of images stored on the server system and having at least an image portion representing a minimum image area, and
an image processing program executable on the server system and having program code for creating at least one cropped image version of at least one image selected from the plurality of stored images such that the cropped image version is sized to fit at least one image container in at least one stored layout and contains at least the minimum image area of the selected image.
28. (new) An image processing system comprising
at least one server system having data storage means,
a plurality of layouts stored on the server system and including one or more image containers,
a plurality of images stored on the server system and having at least an image portion representing an ideal image area, and
an image processing program executable on the server system and having program code for creating at least one cropped image version of at least one image selected from the

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plurality of stored images such that the cropped image version is sized to fit at least one image container in at least one stored layout and is created from the portion of the selected image representing the ideal image area.

29. (new) An image processing system comprising
at least one server system having data storage means,
a plurality of layouts stored on the server system and including one or more image containers,
a plurality of images stored on the server system and having at least an image portion representing an ideal image area and an image portion representing a minimum image area, and
an image processing program executable on the server system and having program code for creating at least one cropped image version of at least one image selected from the plurality of stored images such that the cropped image version is sized to fit at least one image container in at least one stored layout, is created from the portion of the selected image representing the ideal image area, and contains at least the minimum image area.
30. (new) A method for processing a digital image to prepare the image for use with an automated cropping system, the method comprising
examining the content of the image,
based on the content of the image, defining at least one portion of the image to be used by the automated cropping system in preparing a cropped version of the image, and
storing the image and the definition of the at least one portion of the image.
31. (new) The method of claim 30 wherein at least one defined portion of the image is a minimum area of the image that must appear in every cropped version of the image.
32. (new) The method of claim 30 wherein at least one defined portion of the image is an ideal area representing a desirable area of the image.